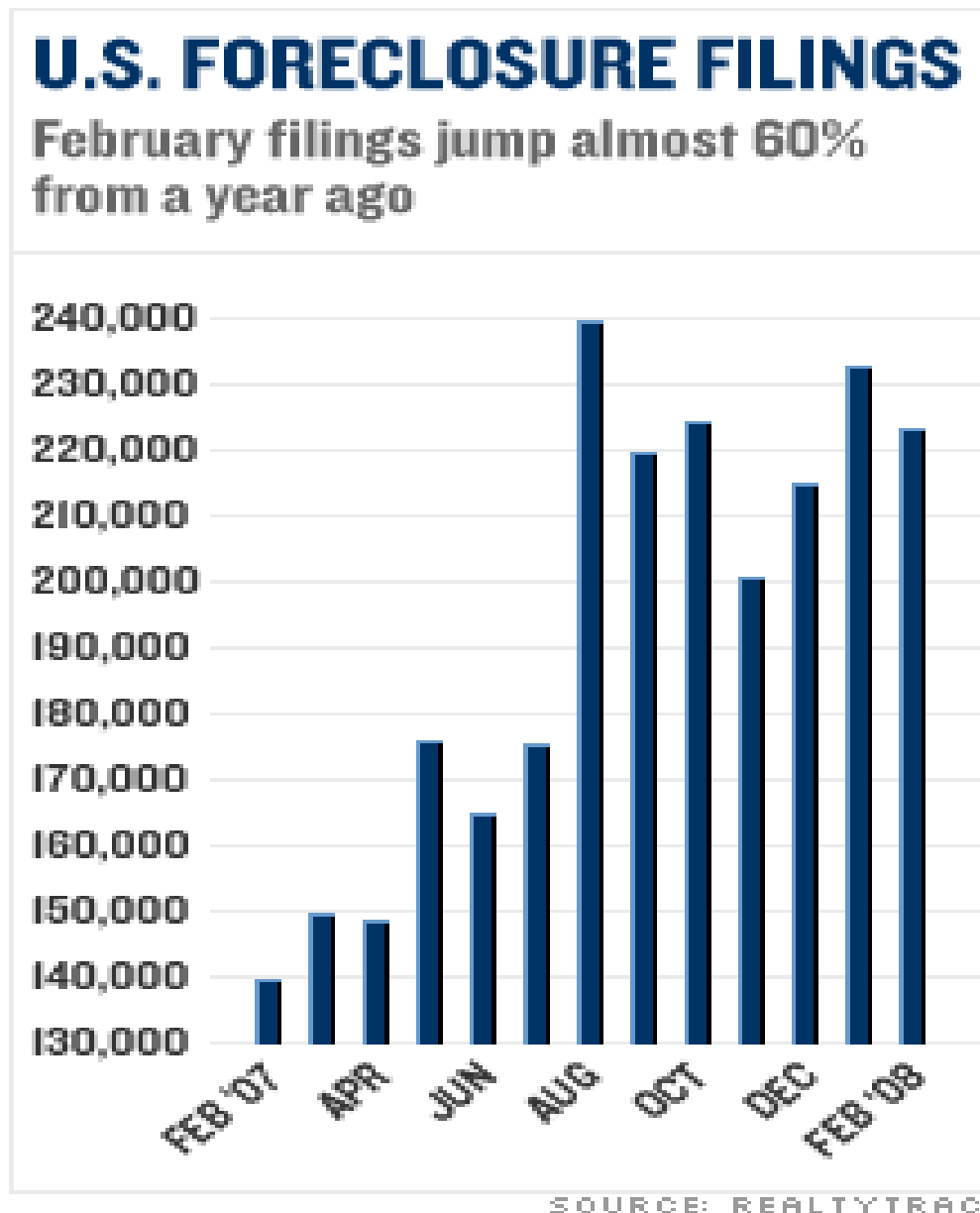


Foreclosures up 60% in February

The number of filings jumps year over year but decreases modestly over last month.

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NEW YORK (CNMoney.com) -- Foreclosure filings nationwide jumped 60% in February, compared with the same month last year, but they decreased slightly versus January, according to a report released Thursday.



RealtyTrac, an online marketer of foreclosure properties, said 223,651 homes got hit with foreclosure filings last month, which include default notices, auction sale notices and bank repossessions. 46,508 of those were lost to bank repossessions, which more than doubled over last year.

The report also indicated that foreclosure filings in February fell 4% compared with January, similar to a 6% decrease that occurred during the same time-span in 2007.

The monthly decrease is a "seasonal occurrence," according to Rick Sharga, a RealtyTrac spokesman. Foreclosure rates spike in January when homeowners are saddled with extra debt from the holidays, then settle in February, he said.

The report suggests that efforts from government and consumer groups to combat the rising number of foreclosures have not had a significant impact, according to Jared Bernstein, a senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute.

"I don't see evidence that any of the interventions we've been implementing are having any effect," he said. The report "doesn't show that measures have failed but it's pretty clear that nothing we've undertaken is slowing foreclosures."

Sharga pointed out that the most recent action by the Federal Reserve to inject liquidity into the credit markets could help the mortgage market, though he agreed with Bernstein that "the previously announced government initiatives haven't had any effect."

Nevada, California and Florida had the highest foreclosure filing rates in the nation. One in every 165 households in Nevada received a filing in February, up 68% from a year ago and more than three times the national average. Home prices surged in all three states during the

housing boom, partly due to investment by speculative buyers, but they have fallen dramatically since last summer.

In California, foreclosure activity was up 131% year-over-year with a total of 53,629 filings. Florida reported 32,447 foreclosure filings, up 69% over the same period last year.

Metro areas in California and Florida topped the list of urban centers facing a surge in foreclosure filings.

Florida's Cape Coral-Fort Myers metro area was the hardest hit in February with one in every 84 households receiving a foreclosure filing - 6.7 times the national average. Stockton, Calif., had the second-highest foreclosure rate, where one in every 87 households receiving a filing in February.

Outside of the sun belt, Michigan and Ohio each reported more than 10,000 properties with foreclosure filings in February.

These "Rust Belt" states with struggling economies were originally at the epicenter of the housing crisis that began last year with the collapse of the subprime mortgage market.

Now, states like California and Florida, where speculative investing helped inflate a housing bubble that has since burst, are struggling with a housing glut, record low home prices and skyrocketing foreclosure rates. ■

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